

# County Line

News from the Government Offices of Lumpkin County, Georgia

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## Finances Under Microscope: "Drastic Improvement"

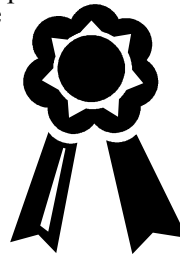
Lumpkin County's 2004 audit report showed continued and "drastic" improvement since 2000. Presented by a representative of the independent audit firm of Bates, Carter & Co., P.C., at the May Board of Commissioners' meeting, the report noted county revenues exceeded expenditures for the second year in a row in 2004—big news since we had been operating in the red between 2000 and 2002. Other favorable highlights: Lumpkin's ratio of revenues to expenditures was better than other Georgia counties of similar size. Our debt service ratio was lower than similar-sized counties. And the ratio of debt service to assessed property value was better than the ratio considered good by the benchmark Moody's bond rating system. The auditors also said if things stay on course, SPLOST collections should be adequate to pay off the remainder of the \$15.75 million debt incurred in 2001 to get Lumpkin County out of financial crisis.

On the "could-be-better" side, per-person long-term debt was somewhat higher for Lumpkin citizens than in most other counties our size. Per-person expenditures, especially on capital projects and debt service, were



## Kudos to Finance Department

The Lumpkin County Finance Department has earned a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the year 2003. It's the second consecutive year the county has received that recognition from the Government Finance Officers Association. Only a handful of counties of similar size have accomplished the feat. Frank Youngblood, who was the county's finance director from 2002 through February of this year and now works in private industry in Lumpkin County, accepted the certificate on behalf of Lumpkin County and the finance department staff at last month's board of commissioners' meeting. The GFOA is an education and information resource that promotes high standards in government accounting.



higher. We spent slightly more of our revenue on operating expenditures than did our peer counties. And property taxes in 2004 were about \$4 per person higher in Lumpkin.

Copies of the audit, covering the accounts of all departments, county funds, elected officials and the Development Authority and Water & Sewerage Authority, are available in the finance department.

## Planning: Director's Chair Filled

When a county is growing as fast as Lumpkin County is, planning department functions are critical. Trees are coming down, dirt is being moved, homes and buildings are going up. Someone's got to manage all that activity to make sure it happens according to plan, and Lumpkin County has brought in Tim Schick to do just that. The new planning director stepped into a role in May that had been vacant for several months. So, even though interim director Frances French had done a great job of holding the fort down, his introduction to Lumpkin County was akin to jumping onto a moving freight train!

Tim seems up to the task at hand, though. He comes to Lumpkin with about 7 years of county government experience from Hall County, where he worked first in the developmental services department and later under the engineering office of the public works department. Most recently, he held a supervisory environment field engineer position in Hall's code enforcement office. Just as important as his varied skills base is the personality he brings to the job. Tim is a "people person" who is focused on customer service, whether the customer happens to be a major developer, an individual with a concern or another county department head. He'll need his positive communication skills, too, as he and the planning department work to uphold the intentions of the county's master land use plan and help development here happen, well...according to plan.



## Home Depot: Thanks for "Picking" Lumpkin County

A groundbreaking ceremony didn't seem quite right, since heavy machinery had been moving dirt for weeks at the intersection of GA 400 and 60. But a recent "ground picking" ceremony was the perfect way to celebrate Atlanta-based Home Depot's decision to build a store at the busy Lumpkin County crossroads. On hand for the event were more than a hundred representatives of the county, city, state and school system, as well as local business leaders, elected officials and other dignitaries, developers and other guests.

Gold spray painted pick axes and a giant faux gold nugget were fitting props for "photo ops" with some of the key people who had made the project possible, including representatives of Lumpkin County's Development Authority and Water and Sewerage Authority, The Home Depot and shopping center developer Maxwell Properties. When it opens, Home Depot is expected to bring some 200 jobs and an economic impact of more than a million dollars a year to the county in property, sales and inventory taxes, as well as about \$6 million in new payroll to the area.

## PAWS for Thought

The Lumpkin County Animal Shelter and PAWS Humane Society at 1363 Red Oak Flats Road have dozens of healthy, loving puppies, dogs, kittens and cats who desperately need caring families. Shouldn't your next pet be a PAWS pet? Stop by the shelter, visit [www.lumpkincountypaws.petfinder.com](http://www.lumpkincountypaws.petfinder.com) or call 867-PAWS for details.



# Lumpkin County . . . continued from reverse side

## Mapping for Success

When Lumpkin County School Superintendent Dewey Moye needed a better way to visualize growth trends that could impact the school system, he turned to Blair Housley for help. Blair, a certified project management professional who serves as Lumpkin County's GIS coordinator, uses Geographic Information Systems technology to organize information in map form so it's more usable than it would be as a list, chart or graph. The resulting map gave the superintendent an easy way to see and share with others how new neighborhoods might impact his classrooms.

Sure, he could have stuck push pins into a map showing new residential developments. But what if he also wanted to see the number of families in each neighborhood, as well as current bus routes, traffic patterns and whether certain roads are wide enough for buses? That push pin map would be a mess, not a useful planning tool. GIS "layers" the information—say, schools on one layer, subdivisions on another layer and current



bus routes on another—to show patterns and relationships between bits of information.

Besides showing what exists now, Blair uses GIS to help planners see the results of potential changes. For example, how many homes would be effected if a certain road were widened? With the right data, he can map almost anything, from water systems, county roads and flood plain areas to parcels of land with specific acreage, retail stores with a certain amount of square footage—even how far the county's emergency alert system can be heard.

Blair holds a GIS certificate and a bachelor of science degree in geography from the University of Georgia and has worked with Lumpkin County almost a year. He knows the GIS and other tools in his office could help county and private business planners even more and plans to grow his services as the county budget allows. Among his goals: encouraging government departments and other entities to share more information, building his office's data bases and updating the county's aerial photography.

## Judges Get Fine Solution to Tech Costs

Caseloads are growing. New state laws require more complex book-keeping. And local governments are having a harder time getting their share of fines they collect for traffic violations and certain crimes. Lumpkin County's probate and magistrate courts *must* have up-to-date computer systems and software, but who'll foot the bill? Probate Judge Michael Chastain and Magistrate Judge Jeff Lowe figure it makes sense for the people who "use" the courts and are assessed fines to fund the courts' growing tech needs. They asked 9<sup>th</sup> District Rep. Amos Amerson to introduce a bill allowing the courts to add a technology fee onto traffic and criminal fines. The bill passed, and the courts will begin collecting the fees July 1. The money will go into a technology fund for equipment, software, technical support and training. Lumpkin County's



## Just Call or Click!

If you have questions or concerns about your county government, answers or assistance are as close as your phone or computer. For contact information for county departments or commissioners, see Dept. and Contact Info., [www.lumpkincounty.gov](http://www.lumpkincounty.gov) or call 864-3742.

## County Commission

Steve Gooch, Chairman  
Dr. John Raber, District 1  
Deborah Hutcheson, District 2  
Clarence Stowers, District 3  
Marvin Martin, District 4

Stan Kelley  
County Manager

probate and magistrate courts are the first in the state for whom this legislation has been enacted and will be first to implement these fees.

## Books To Go

There's nothing like curling up with a good book when you can't get out of the house. That's why the Chestatee Regional Library System offers a special, very personalized, service for people who are homebound. Those who are physically unable to visit the library due to health problems or other circumstances are invited to call and ask about having books delivered to them at home. After a brief phone conversation determines the



need is there, Lumpkin County branch manager Kathleen Walker visits the homebound person. Usually, a brief conversation helps her understand what kinds of reading materials the person enjoys—and *doesn't* like. Back at the library, she hand picks an armful of books, which are then delivered to the person's home. For anyone not up for reading, a stock of recorded books is also available. Kathleen says the service is a labor of love, and she's glad to help bring the joy of books to others. For details, call 864-3668, extension 221.



## State Fines Drive Home Message

For any driver who receives a "Notice of Lapse in Mandatory Insurance Coverage" from the Georgia Department of Motor Vehicle Safety, Lumpkin County's tax office has some advice: Don't ignore it—even if you've since gotten re-insured. Not responding could result in fees and even vehicle registration suspension. State law requires *continuous* insurance. If there is even a single day between one policy's end date and another's start date, the car owner is charged a \$25 lapse fee. If the fee isn't paid in 30 days, there's another \$60 fee and the registration is suspended.

Whether the lapse is from a payment mailed too late, a change of insurance companies, or simply failure to keep the insurance in force, many confused motorists have ended up in the tax office, notices in hand. The tax office staff recommends that car owners who receive notices first check with their insurance companies to figure out the problem, then follow up with the tax commissioner's office, either to make sure corrections were made in the database or to take their lumps in the form of lapse and reinstatement fees, whichever the case may be. For details call the tax office at 864-2666.

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